

# Social dialogue as a driver and governance instrument for sustainable development

DRAFT

Maarten Hermans, Jan Van Ongevalle & Huib Huyse

HIVA – KU Leuven

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## 2 SUMMARY

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This discussion note outlines an initial framework for thinking about, and assessing how social dialogue contributes to sustainable development. The note emerges from observations by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) that social dialogue, one of the core features of the decent work agenda, is not well-known and understood within the development community, and its potential in contributing to sustainable development and its governance is not sufficiently tapped-into. This is a paradox as the instrument of social dialogue has a lot to offer in terms of realising core-principles of the Development Effectiveness Agenda and in contributing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

By bringing together leading resources on the topics of social dialogue and sustainable development, the note maps and examines what is currently known about the rich relationship between the two themes in a short and summarized way.

The note argues that social dialogue is itself a form of governance that provides specific advantages towards realizing the sustainable development. These advantages are linked to the inclusive nature of the social dialogue process and the way interaction is organised. At the same time, for social dialogue to have a positive effect on the realization of sustainable development, an enabling environment is essential, characterized by the will of parties to engage in a dialogue and the supporting role of the state.

While social dialogue is a well-established instrument which is practiced intensively on a daily basis across the world and has been the topic of a growing set of studies – especially in the developed economies –, there is a need for a new and ambitious research agenda to understand much better the many pathways through which social dialogue can optimally contribute to sustainable development.

Throughout the discussion note illustrations are provided of how social dialogue contributes to five key dimensions (thematic clusters) of sustainable development, together with an analysis of critical context factors which need to be in place for social dialogue to be able to play that role. The note concludes with a brief outline for future research.

## 3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK – WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

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### 3.1 BASIC CONCEPTS AND THEMES

Three basic concepts – *sustainable development* and its *governance*, and *social dialogue* – are central to this discussion note. While there is no agreed definition for the first two concepts, they are well-known to the development field and extensively used in development policy and practice. The concept of social dialogue on the other hand is much less prominent and known in development circles.

**Social dialogue**, according to the definition of the ILO, includes “all types of negotiation, consultation and information sharing among representatives of governments, social partners or between social partners on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy” (ILO, 2013a). It can take place at national, regional, sectoral or company level. Getting to grips with the specific effects of social dialogue requires further specification according to the form, level, involved actors, processes and topics of social dialogue—something outside of the scope of this discussion note.

Social dialogue differs from other ways of governing labour relations through the types of outputs it produces and the means to achieve them. Social dialogue creates tangible outputs, such as collective bargaining agreements and social pacts. It can also involve the co-determination of policies, or the tripartite governance of certain policy areas (human resources development, employment policies, ..). Outputs will typically be achieved through negotiations or cooperation between government and social partners (tripartite), or between social partners (bipartite). This is fundamentally different from, for example, unilateral decisions taken by government on labour-issues (eg. labour legislation on minimum wages), or no-go or conflict strategies, such as protests, strikes, or lock-outs.

Since the Brundtland report from 1987, all the way to the adoption of the SDGs in 2015, a clear and immutable meaning of **sustainable development** remains elusive (Kates, Parris, & Leiserowitz, 2005). Throughout that period, experience has also shown that there is no centrally determined blueprint for the practical implementation of sustainable development. Both its content and translation into practice will need to be negotiated or planned through some kind of dialogue and collective discussions, embedded in systems of governance (Carter, 2007; Jordan, 2008).

In this note, the ILO definition<sup>1</sup> for sustainable development emerging from 102<sup>nd</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference (2013) is used. “Sustainable development means that the needs of the present generation should be met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development has three dimensions economic, social and environmental which are interrelated, of equal importance and must be addressed together.” ILO argues that the four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda – social dialogue, social protection, rights at work and employment – are indispensable building blocks of sustainable development and must be at the center of policies for strong, sustainable and inclusive growth and development.

Given the conceptual fluidity of sustainable development and its multi-dimensional nature, the note identifies five thematic clusters of goals to which social dialogue has shown to contribute: four clusters relate to core dimensions of sustainable development, one cluster deals with its governance.

The clusters are used in the remainder of the note to summarize the contribution of social dialogue to the realization and governance of sustainable development. The five thematic clusters covering core-dimensions of sustainable development are:

1. Working conditions, workers’ rights and equality at work
2. Access (to public services) and redistribution
3. Growth and innovation
4. Environment & climate
5. Governance and participation

Finally, we define “**governance**” as a form of governing which can involve different social actors in activities that seek to guide, steer, control or manage (sectors or facets of) societies (Kooiman, 1993, p2.). The advantage of using the term “governance” is that it allows a much broader range of stakeholders besides the government or the state to be considered in the analysis of any process of governing.

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<sup>1</sup> Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all (ILO, 2013)

### 3.2 HOW SOCIAL DIALOGUE CONTRIBUTES TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: 4 PRINCIPLES

When analysing the literature on how social dialogue contributes to development, there is a good match with at least three core principles of the development effectiveness agenda (Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation<sup>2</sup>, 2011), especially for the principles of **democratic ownership**, **inclusiveness** and **accountability**. Through these principles, social dialogue in itself offers both an instrument and a form of governance to contribute to the achievement of social and economic development objectives.

Table 1 summarizes how the three principles are operationalized in this note.

Principle	Explanation
<b>Inclusiveness</b>	<p>Social dialogue promotes <b>inclusiveness</b> as representative and independent workers' and employers' organisations alongside government seek solutions to issues of common concern. Given their nature of representative organizations, social partners bring together the points of view of a multitude of employees and employers. In the case of unions, through their democratic structures and elected leadership this is further re-enforced up to the workers' level. In developing countries, increasingly informal workers are also represented through the union representation in social dialogue structures<sup>3</sup>. In the academic literature, this is described as providing <i>voice to key stakeholders</i> by providing channels/levels for participation in decision making processes.</p> <p>As part of this principle, social dialogue is particularly competent in tackling <i>collective action problems</i>, a specific type of development problem of which leading research institutes<sup>4</sup> are concluding that most traditional development programmes are failing to solve them. A collective action problem arises when the members of a group fail to act together to secure an outcome that has most potential to benefit the group<sup>5</sup>. Social dialogue has been found to be capable of solving collective action problems in the area of decent work and beyond, for example by stimulating solutions which go beyond a pure-market-logic and which avoid environmental damage or the loss of jobs. In similar ways, social dialogue can set common standards or wage-levels in a region or sector, thus removing to some degree these elements from competition and so reducing the chance of a downward spiral on labour and environmental conditions (Kleinknecht, 1998).</p>
<b>Democratic ownership</b>	<p>Social dialogue, through its main processes of information-sharing, consultation, negotiation and joint decision-making, allows the social partners to share their views on policies or measures that affect them. These are important ingredients of democracy and can improve the chances of <b>democratic ownership</b> and effective implementation of those policies or measures by public authorities and social partners (ILO, 2013a).</p>
<b>Accountability</b>	<p>In addition, social dialogue provides various opportunities for strengthening transparency and <b>accountability</b> among the various actors involved. In the case</p>

<sup>2</sup> Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness Nov – Dec, 2011, Busan, South-Korea  
<http://www.oecd.org/development/effectiveness/49650173.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Dialogue with other groups of civil society (in case of tripartite-plus) allows for the inclusion of a wider perspective and consensus on specific issues beyond the labour agenda .

<sup>4</sup> See for example: <https://differenttakeonafrica.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/joint-statement.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Collective action problems cover a wide range of topics, ranging from climate change, or ending the race to the bottom on working conditions and tax competition, and curbing corruption. The dilemma arising from these type of problems is described by one author as the problem of standing up at football matches: "if everyone sits down, they could all see just as well, but how do you get everyone to sit down?".

of consultations for example, government is supposed to provide feedback to the social partners on the follow-up. In some countries such feedback is legally required through institutionalized tripartite structures. Also the participation of social partners as representatives of workers and employers in the boards of social security institutions can help to make management of those institutions more accountable (ILO, 2013a). In the academic literature this is described as *counterbalancing asymmetric social relations*, ranging from participation to social dialogue processes to industrial actions of various forms.

Table 1: Clarifying three underlying principles/mechanisms of how social dialogue contributes to sustainable development

Through the above outlined core principles, social dialogue is able to provide alternative governance mechanisms that are not available in institutional contexts where governance is only determined by the market or the State (Keune, 2015).

### 3.3 LINK WITH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

While the note describes how social dialogue relates to sustainable development beyond the specific targets set in international frameworks such as the **sustainable development goals** (SDGs), themselves an outcome of collective discussions on sustainable development, there is a clear link. The five thematic clusters identified cover most of the focus targets of the ILO (ILO, 2015) for the 17 SDGs, with each cluster contributing to several SDGs, as will be illustrated in the coming sections. Figure 1 visualizes how the five thematic clusters (on top of the table) broadly relate to the 17 SDGs (numbered from 1 to 17).

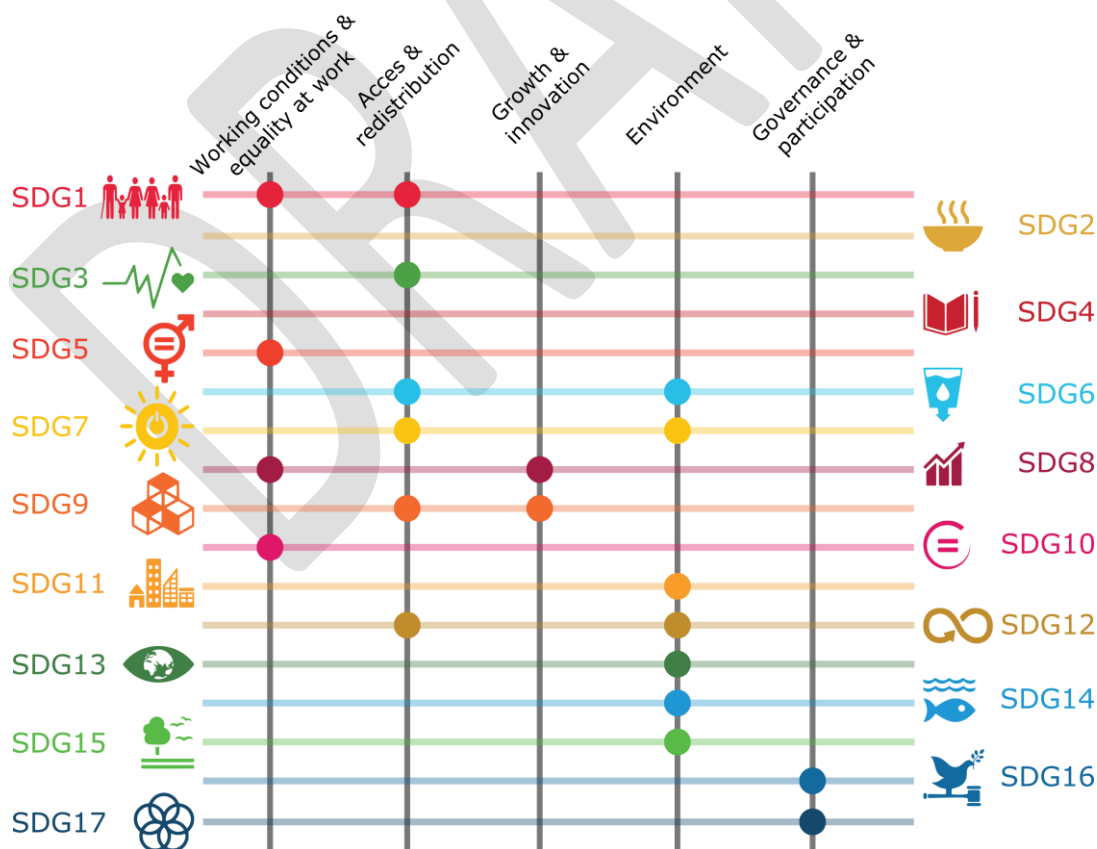


Figure 1: Grouping the 17 SDG into five thematic clusters

In the coming sections the link with the SDGs will be illustrated shortly for each of the five clusters of objectives .

## 4 WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL DIALOGUE TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

This chapter provides an overview of how social dialogue contributes to five key areas of sustainable development, illustrated with examples from the literature. The idea is not to be exhaustive but to present the key mechanisms at play, explain how principles from the development effectiveness agenda are operationalized in social dialogue, and, finally, point at gaps in the body of knowledge.

### 4.1 WORKING CONDITIONS, WORKERS' RIGHTS AT AND EQUALITY AT WORK

This note jointly considers working conditions and workers' rights, together with equality at work in this thematic cluster, as debates on decent work and the (unequal) distribution of benefits arising from economic activity, are deeply entwined in contemporary neo-liberal societies. In this way, social dialogue contributes to SDG1 (ending poverty), SDG 5 (achieving gender equality), SDG 8 (promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work), and SDG 10 (reducing inequality).

The way social dialogue contributes to the SDGs is in line with the Busan development effectiveness principles. When working conditions are set and monitored through a negotiated and transparent process which includes social partners and the government, three development effectiveness principles are actually at play at the same time: the governance process is (1) inclusive and addresses collective action problems, avoiding a race to the bottom through competitive pressures; (2) creates ownership of the social dialogue actors; and (3) the different stakeholders are held accountable to each other.

This cluster is the most self-evident area of contributions of social dialogue to social and economic development, as working conditions (wage setting, other benefits, non-discrimination, career promotion, ..), workplace democracy (workers' rights) and therefore the fair redistribution of company benefits, are the core drivers of social dialogue. At national level social dialogue translates, for example into tripartite negotiations on national socio-economic policies and basic working conditions<sup>6</sup>. In many countries, wage levels and other working conditions are negotiated at the sectoral, regional or company level through bipartite negotiations between social partners. An example of the developmental impact of such bipartite negotiations is provided in Box 1.

#### **Box 1 | – Sectoral national employment councils in Zimbabwe**

Although Zimbabwe has been repeatedly under international scrutiny for more than two decades for violations against trade union rights, and its national tripartite structures have been rather dormant, there is a long tradition of bipartite social dialogue negotiations, mostly achieved through the system of sectoral national employment councils (NEC), in which employer representatives and workers' representatives sector negotiate on working conditions and wage levels. The system was functioning relatively well although the economy has

<sup>6</sup> Depending on the context, the setting of minimum wages by the government can be either a decision taken unilaterally outside social dialogue negotiations, or may have been negotiated in tripartite social dialogue.

been shrinking for almost two decades (with a short upheaval in the period 2012-2013). A recent national CBA audit by the research institute LEDRIZ (2015) has shown that through annual wage negotiations at the sectoral level, the gap with the living wage (poverty datum line) decreased substantially in the period 2012-2014 (in the formal sector). Starting from 2015, employers refused to further negotiate further because of the continued deterioration of the economy. In addition, the political influence on the judiciary has been increasing over the last few years, making dispute mechanisms less effective. This example shows that bipartite negotiations can form a complementary mechanism to work on decent work conditions under difficult circumstances, especially in contexts where the government is hostile towards organised labour.

Since the 2008 financial crisis, interest in the inequality-reducing impact of social dialogue has picked-up. Research—mainly in OECD-countries—demonstrates various ways in which social dialogue brings more equality in wage-setting, resulting in (1) a larger share of earnings for middle- and low income workers, (2) less income inequality with the top of the wage distribution, and (3) higher shares of income from labour in countries' gross domestic product (GDP).

Aside from realising more equal wage outcomes for an overall category of workers, social dialogue can also contribute to reducing wage inequalities for specific disadvantaged sub-groups of workers. In this way, the positive impact of social dialogue extends to addressing societal inequalities, such as the gender pay gap, which would otherwise remain unaddressed through the normal wage formation process. For example, as women are overrepresented in precarious, low-waged work with lower coverage of firm-level collective bargaining, centralized tripartite social dialogue instruments -such as minimum wages- are sometimes used to correct market forces. Moreover, the same instrument can also increase the participation rates of women to the labour market, as raising wages at the lower end of the income distribution increases the opportunity cost of taking-up a job. In realizing this full potential of social dialogue for gender equality, there needs to be however more attention to gender concerns in collective bargaining.

In addition to the instrument of minimum wage, there is also a growing body of evidence that points towards the potential of national tripartite social dialogue and collective bargaining in addressing broader gender issues at national and company levels. Box 2 illustrates how gender issues were addressed through a European-wide framework agreement with a multinational company (Areva Group) .

#### **Box 2 | Addressing gender issues in a multinational through social dialogue.**

In 2006, the Areva management, the European Works Council and the European Metalworkers' Federation signed the European framework agreement on equal opportunities within the Areva Group in Europe. It covers non-discrimination at the recruitment stage, equal access to career promotion for all employees, as well as equal access to pay and training. It also establishes a Women's Forum which includes a hundred women from all areas and positions who will meet twice a year. The agreement is not a mere declaration of intent but expresses a commitment on the part of the signatories to improve standards of equal opportunities for men and women and for the professional integration of disabled people within all the structures of the Areva Group in Europe. (Briskin & Muller, 2011, p.6).

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*This section builds on findings from the following sources (Van Gyes et al., 2015; Kristal, 2010; Shin, 2014; Volscho & Kelly, 2012; Jaumotte & Buitron, 2015; Hayter, 2015; Gammage, 2015; Pillinger, 2014; Briskin & Muller, 2011)*

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## 4.2 ACCESS TO PUBLIC GOODS AND REDISTRIBUTION

Social dialogue is a key instrument for influencing the orientation of socio-economic policies, for example on social protection, towards more inclusiveness and a more comprehensive coverage for low income households, while at the same time contributing to redistribution, evidence shows. This effect of social dialogue touches on all references to (equal) access in various SDGs, and is strongly linked to the provision of public goods in the area of health (SDG3), education (SDG4), clean water and sanitation (SDG6), and housing (SDG11). This thematic cluster also contributes to SDG1, as poverty is influenced by better access to public services and by redistribution through taxation.

From the viewpoint of development effectiveness, at least two principles are mobilized in this mechanism. Bringing together a broad range of societal actors in the discussions and consultations on changes to social security systems, for example, mobilizes the inclusiveness principle, at the same time tackling collective action problems around redistribution, all highly sensitive and political issues. The fact this is done with representative actors increases the democratic ownership of the process.

The contribution of social dialogue to improved access to public goods and redistribution emerges from a wide range of research sources. Research has for example identified the positive role played by social partners in social dialogue in improving access for workers to social protection schemes and other social services, as well as increasing public spending on these domains. Social dialogue can therefore be instrumental in supporting the shift in thinking, from evaluating public services mainly on costs and efficiency, to evaluating it on criteria such as access and impact on equality. Box 3 provides an example of such a process in Uruguay.

### **Box 3 | Social security provisions through national dialogue in Uruguay** (Cuesta Duarte Institute, 2016)

The *National Dialogue on Social Security* (NDSS, 2007-2012) brings together a broad range of societal actors in the discussion on changes to the social security system. These actors include representatives of workers, pensioners and employers, civil society organizations, government and academic institutions, etc.

The outcomes of the first round (2007-2008) of NDSS were highly promising, with a redesign and extension of the unemployment benefits. The second round was held between late 2010 and 2012 with the more ambitious goal of addressing outstanding and more contentious issues such as permanent disability benefits and wage guarantee funds, but resulted in more limited outcomes.

The process is an example of how channels can be provided for the participation of employee and employer organizations. At the same time, it illustrates that in settings where instructional features are less extensive, social dialogue provides a flexible 'space of governance' which can accommodate a broad range of actors (cf. section **Error! Reference source not found.**).



Strengthening the provision of public services through social dialogue is also beneficial from the point of view of redistribution, as the (cash) value of public services forms a relatively larger and sizable part of lower income households. In other words, public services financed through taxation of the overall population have an important redistributive effect because these services would otherwise take a large portion of the income or even be unaffordable for lower income households.

Similar mechanisms are visible for workers in the informal economy, research evidence shows. An increased provision of public services frees up some of the income of these workers, especially relevant as they are often unable to contribute towards contributory social security systems. A notable example is the case of Indonesia where a large coalition of trade unions and other civil organisations managed to pressurize the government into the signing a new law that mandated (through a progressive implementation) the extension of social security coverage to the whole population in the categories of health, work injury, old age, and death of the breadwinner and with trade unions represented in the social security's tripartite supervisory body.

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*This section builds on findings from the following sources (Hayter, 2015) (Hermann, 2014) (van Ginneken, 1999) (Cuesta Duarte Institute, 2016) (Labor Institute Indonesia, 2015).*

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### 4.3 GROWTH AND INNOVATION

This section covers the evidence of social dialogue contributing to improved productivity and economic growth on the one hand, and the stimulation of innovation during economic activity on the other hand. The contributions of social dialogue in the growth and innovation cluster, can be summarized into four effects: (1) creating incentives to invest in professional development of employees through instruments such as pooled training funds; (2) stimulating firm competition on basis of product innovation rather than a race to the bottom in working conditions; (3) pushing for sustainable macroeconomic and development policies; and (4) creating social stability by moving contentious industrial relations issues to higher levels of governance.

In addition to these four general effects, there are strong indications that social dialogue can contribute to growth by strengthening productivity and innovation at the enterprise level. These issues are however difficult to research, highly context-dependent, and findings tend to be less consistent in the literature.

Through its contribution towards economic growth and innovation, social dialogue can contribute to SDG8 (decent work & economic growth) and SDG9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure). In terms of the development effectiveness agenda it is especially the principle of inclusiveness, and more specifically the ability to solve collection action problems, which contributes to the effectiveness of social dialogue in this area, as will be illustrated in this section.

The four main mechanisms in this cluster all involve the leveling of the playground for firms, in this way stimulating competition based on innovation and growth, rather than forms of competition which lead to the erosion of social or ecological standards.

The first mechanism involves the creation of incentives for companies to invest in a skilled labour force through training and skills-matching, by correcting failures of the free market and inadequacies of mere government policy in education and training. In a competitive labour market, individual firms have a disincentive to invest in workers beyond directly required and firm-specific skills because of fears of staff turn-over through the poaching of freshly trained workers, leading to an under-provision of training and lagging aggregate skill-levels. This market failure—which leads to lower levels of

innovation and growth—can be corrected through bipartite or tripartite social dialogue, which then removes the market-based disincentive by creating agreements and pooled funds for training. For example, an individual firm might be hesitant to train employees which might be poached by another firm, but when many firms in a sector have agreed to provide training through a sectoral fund, this reluctance decreases.

Through the second mechanism, bi- or tripartite bargaining imposes minimum wage levels and other minimal working conditions on companies in a given sector or area, leading again to healthy forms of competition<sup>7</sup>. In unregulated competitive settings, firms are forced to compete on ‘low-route strategies’—at the cost of social and environmental concerns, and even their own long-term survival. For example, a firm might want to compete on product innovation while paying decent wages, but is under pressure from other firms who focus on keeping down wage costs. When multi-employer wage agreements fix wages to some degree, competing on product innovation becomes a more viable route, and low-wage, less innovative firms face increasing pressure from creative destruction. Social dialogue therefore removes these issues partially from competition, thus regulating firm behavior towards growth and innovation-oriented ‘high-route strategies’ of competition.

#### **Box 4 | Tripartite-guided industrial policy in Brazil**

The *Plano Brasil Maior* (PBM, 2011-2014) is a set of industrial policies, developed in the wake of the financial crisis and fierce import-competition, and focused on the local aggregation of value added through innovation. The goals of PMB are divided in three dimensions (competences, structural change and efficiency, and market expansion) that contribute to the overall target of sustainable development.

The multi-layered governance structure of the PBM contains tripartite structures on various levels, from the Industrial Development Council at the strategic level, to the Sectoral Competitiveness Councils on the articulation and policy formation level. This configuration and the resulting debate and interaction among stakeholders is identified as essential to the effectiveness of PBM (Ferraz et al., 2014).

The third mechanism shows how social dialogue as a governance instrument can avoid elite capture of macro-economic policies in developing countries, in this way safeguarding their original orientation towards growth and innovation. Macro-economic policies are central to sustainable growth in developing countries, with industrial policy having a prominent role in stimulating growth and innovation. Given the shift away from the non-interventionist line of industrial policy of the eighties, governments have looked for ways to promote and stimulate innovation and economic growth through different policy measures. Research has found that policy measures which are co-designed and monitored through social dialogue tend to have a higher chance of sticking to the original goals. This mechanism is increasingly relevant in the case of developing countries, given the higher risk of (regulatory) capture of the weak state structures by private actors. Tripartite social dialogue and partnership approaches are necessary to counter this state capture, and keep policies on the intended course<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> This mechanism is called ‘beneficial regulations’ in the specialised literature.

<sup>8</sup> This is linked to the monitoring function of social dialogue, on which we expand in section 4.5 on governance.

The final effect is linked to the representative nature of social partners and to their bargaining role. By lifting industrial relation disputes, for example on wages, from the firm-level to sectoral or national levels, social dialogue creates stability at the firm level and spaces for more cooperative and innovation-supporting dynamics.

Apart from these four effects, there is research evidence that social dialogue also contributes to growth and innovation through the previous cluster (4.2 on access and inequality). Improved access to public services such as education has complementary effects in this cluster. For example, strengthening the access to further education and improving female labor market participation creates in the medium-term the necessary conditions for economic growth in sectors requiring sufficient higher-educated workers. Secondly, there is also growing awareness and empirical evidence that increasing inequality is harmful for growth. For example, the share of the income from labour-related activities in the national income (GNP) compared to income from capital show a downward trend for most large economies, depressing household consumption and aggregate demand and leading to both low global economic growth and inequality between wage-earners and those with capital-based incomes. Similarly, increases in income for the top 20% of the income distribution are negatively associated with overall economic growth, while increases for the bottom 20% positively correlate with growth. In reducing these types of inequality, social dialogue is also contributing to the basis for growth.

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*This section builds on findings from the following sources (Addison, 2009; Marsden & Canibano, 2010) (Menezes-Filho & Van Reenen, 2003) (Van den Berg, Grift, & Van Witteloostuijn, 2011) (Ferrás, Kupfer, & Marques, 2014) (Hall & Soskice, 2001; McLaughlin, 2013) (Keune, 2015; Streeck, 1997) (Kleinknecht, 1998) (Salazar-Xirinachs, Nübler, & Kozul-Wright, 2014) (Ferrás et al., 2014; Stiglitz, 1998) (Finnestrand, 2011; Hermans & Ramioul, 2016) (International Labour Organization, 2015) (Dabla-Norris, Kochhar, Suphaphiphat, Ricka, & Tsounta, 2015).*

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#### 4.4 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE

Prominent examples of sustainable and future-oriented environmental policy-initiatives in the context of labour, are the *Green Jobs* initiative set up in 2008 by ILO, UNEP, ITUC and IOE, as well as the *Green Jobs Programme* launched by ILO in 2009. These programs recognize social dialogue as instrumental for deliberating on and building support for the implications of new environmental policy initiatives on labour issues.

The supportive role of social dialogue as a form of governance for the deliberation on and the implementation of ecological policies extends however beyond the labour-ecology nexus. The international trade union confederation (ITUC) has called for a 'just transition', which uses social dialogues as a governance instrument for climate action, and which leads to decent jobs and overall social progress. Promoting consensus building and cooperation among government and social partners through social dialogue is seen as essential given the profound changes in production, consumption, technologies and jobs that comes with a transition to a greener economy. This section describes various examples of the use of social dialogue in transition processes towards a green economy. Social dialogue can contribute to a range of environment and climate-related SDGs, ranging from SDG 6 & 7, up to SDGS 11, 12,13, 14 and 15.

The development effectiveness principles of inclusiveness and democratic ownership are put into action when social actors, who may hold very different viewpoints and interests, are involved in structured consultations and negotiations regarding greening initiatives.

Firstly, social dialogue around environmental policy allows the inclusion of different viewpoints in the assessment of environmental issues and sustainable development. This has shown to promote a better understanding among social dialogue actors of each other's opportunities, challenges and needs. Such understanding can help to build consensus and ownership of policies which can in turn positively contribute to their implementation. Evidence also shows that the formalization of social dialogue may further increase the chance that the resulting agreements and recommendations are translated into specific policies that get implemented. A notable example is provided by the trade union-proposed social dialogue round tables that were established by law in Spain in 2005, allowing the participation of social partners in the design as well as the monitoring of the national emission allocation plan (NEAP). Also in developing countries there are examples of tripartite-plus governance structures, such as in Senegal and Sierra Leone, who have national climate committees with a representation of employers, unions and other civil society organisations. The Green Accord in South Africa is another example, described in Box 5.

#### **Box 5 | The Green Accord in South Africa**

In South Africa the "Green Economy Accord" was signed in 2011 by the government, with the backing of employers, three labour federations (COSATU, FEDUSA and NACTU, accounting for more than 2 million workers) and other CSOs. The tripartite-plus accord represents a comprehensive social partnership (government, employers, trade unions and civil society organisations) that aims at developing the green economy aspect of South Africa's New Economic Growth Path which targets the creation of 5 million additional jobs by 2020.

The Green Economy Accord contains 12 commitments and identifies the practical steps that each partner must take to achieve the creation of 300'000 new green and decent jobs within the next 10 years. It is a formal agreement endorsed by different constituencies that sets: 1) quantifiable targets; 2) the time frame for achieving those targets; and 3) the mechanisms for evaluation and monitoring to make sure that the goals are reached.

The Accord is a direct outcome of the national social dialogue on South Africa's New Economic Growth Path which targets the creation of 5 million additional jobs by 2020. This social dialogue is managed by South Africa's national tripartite body NEDLAC (GJI & ILS, 2012; ILO, 2012).

Formalized social dialogue can also help avoid powerful lobbies seeking to block the implementation of ecological regulations. For instance, Belgian social dialogue actors are part of the Federal Council of Sustainable Development<sup>9</sup> whom the government has to inform yearly on the implementation of its recommendations. In the same vein, there are also various instances where social dialogue has been able to ensure that labour standards are respected or improved in the context of greening initiatives. In Brazil for example, tripartite social dialogue resulted in 2009 in the establishment of a tripartite 'national commission for dialogue and evaluation of the National Commitment regarding labour conditions in the biofuel industry'.

<sup>9</sup> FRDO-CFDD, <http://www.frdo-cfdd.be/en/the-council>.

Furthermore, there is evidence that greening initiatives rooted in processes of social dialogue can contribute towards reducing production costs and to influence green policy reforms in such a way that new jobs are created and obsolete jobs are re-oriented. A notable example is the “better not cheaper” approach of the metal workers’ union IG Metall in Germany who, through works councils, pushed for greening activities that would improve resource efficiency, hence increasing competitiveness and job security. In the USA, strategic alliances between unions and environmental organisations, such as the BlueGreen Alliance and Green for All have become strongly influential in the national debates about sustainability transitions and greening of the economy, in this way pushing for large investments in green industries and successfully advocating for the extension of fiscal benefits for green energy producers. Another example from Italy is provided in Box 6.

**Box 6 | Social dialogue to facilitate greening of the production process in Italy**

During renewal of the complementary corporate agreement at the site of Almagia Spa (IT division) in the region of Lazio (Italy), negotiations stalled due to the company having insufficient economic means to meet the financial demands of the company union representative bodies (RSU).

As a way of finding the resources to renew the salary component of the corporate agreement, the RSU proposed to implement measures to improve the energy efficiency of the company processes. The RSU’s proposal was met favorably by the company management, which had already begun working on its own environmental sustainability strategy.

The developments in the talks led to the signature of the trade-union/company agreement on 3 July 2009 and development of the Almagia Green project. This development has furthermore contributed to a ‘qualitative’ leap in Industrial relations in the company. (CSIL, 2015)

Finally, social dialogue has shown to be able to contribute towards enhancing collective learning about technical environmental issues. A notable example of this are the numerous environment conferences in Brazil from 2003 till 2008 at local, regional and national level in order to enhance public participation in the generation of recommendations for mainstreaming environment in different policy sectors. Social dialogue actors can also help the identification of skills needed for a green economy, hence facilitating labour demand and supply matching, as is illustrated by the multi-stakeholders taskforce on green jobs and climate change in India (2009), which included carrying out studies on employment aspects of renewable energy.

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*This section builds on findings from the following sources (ILO, 2013b) (ITUC, 2015) (ILO, 2012b) (ILO, 2012b; ILO, 2012a) (Creten et al., 2014) (Van Gyes et al., 2015; CISL, 2015) (ILO 2013b) (ILO, 2012b; ILO, 2012a).*

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## 4.5 GOVERNANCE AND PARTICIPATION

In the previous sections it was argued that social dialogue, as a form of governance, can contribute to the realization of specific objectives of sustainable development (4.1 to 4.4). At the same time, strengthening governance and participation of sustainable development processes is in itself one of the global challenges, identified for example in the sustainable development goals SDG 16 (Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies) and SDG 17 (Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable

development). This also resonates with a wider trend whereby social dialogue, which has traditionally been associated with employment and labour related issues, is increasingly seen as an instrument to promote democracy and 'good' governance at various levels. This section explores how and why social dialogue can complement or strengthen existing systems of governance in the context of sustainable development.

A core function of social dialogue is exactly to provide an alternative governance structure beyond the individual employee-employer relationship. It can address the democratic deficit or imbalance of power within that relationship. A regime of collective bargaining can for example help to institute a system of checks and balances which can prevent unilateral actions from the employer. Experience in Europe shows that well-structured social dialogue that makes the results of bargaining processes publically available and brings various positions into the open (accountability and inclusiveness), often leads to results. Various authors also refer towards ethical arguments in favour of social dialogue and workplace democracy. Some see them as processes that are rooted in essential human rights and liberty. Others refer to the citizenship argument pointing out that "experiencing participation and control in the workplace can contribute towards developing the values and skills of citizenship and produce social capital".

Another feature of social dialogue is the advantages it entails for reaching agreements in the face of crisis or political and economic transitions. Notable examples include South-Africa during its transition from apartheid as well as Tunisia during the democratic transition after its revolution in 2011 and the signing of a tripartite social contract in 2013 (see Box 7). Tripartite social dialogue was also successfully used as a mechanism to enable economic and political transformation from communist rule to democracy in former Soviet countries in Europe such as Hungary in 1988 and later in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Poland. In these cases, social dialogue was seen as a mechanism that could strengthen cooperation between the actors of labour relations and within society in general.

#### **Box 7 | Tunisia – 2013 tripartite social contract**

In Tunisia, a tripartite "Social Contract" was concluded on 14 January 2013. This agreement, which benefited from strong support from the ILO, was signed on the day of the second anniversary of the events that led to the Arab Spring uprisings, first in Tunisia and then in the region.

The Social Contract is the result of long and difficult negotiations between the most representative organizations of workers and employers, and the government. In the context of the political transition in Tunisia, the Social Contract aims at paving the way for improvements in areas such as labour legislation and industrial relations, employment policies, social protection and vocational training, as well as balanced regional development. It also calls for the establishment of a National Council for Social Dialogue to ensure its implementation. The draft law on the council was approved by cabinet in June 2015. (ILO, 2013d)

An example of the role of social dialogue in economic transitions is provided by tripartite "deliberation councils" in East Asian countries during the crippling financial crisis of 1997. These were established in order to facilitate consultation and information-sharing between the government and social partners and to gain the cooperation of economic elites. In the Republic of Korea, such council contributed to the development of a first-ever social pact allowing the tripartite partners to negotiate the fundamental reforms needed on key labour market issues. Similarly, social and economic councils

were found to play an important role in numerous countries worldwide in enabling broad support for tailor-made policy measures in response to the global financial crisis of 2008. The positive role of social dialogue in these examples is possibly due to the fact that social dialogue consultation, through the principle of democratic ownership, can help overcome resistance to change by promising stakeholders a say in how that change is achieved.

Furthermore, evidence shows that alternative tripartite-like structures can (temporarily) complement the existing social dialogue structures when the state is not playing its role sufficiently. It also allows for the inclusion of other stakeholders in international value chains, such as international buyers and other civil society organisations, when relevant. An example is the *Better Factories Cambodia* project (cf. Box 8), where the working conditions in the garment sector are monitored by independent auditors, under the coordination of ILO. The reports are transmitted to international buyers which buy from the respective suppliers that are audited. The programme covers a large majority of the export-oriented garment companies. A tripartite-like structure with local trade unions and some other stakeholders is monitoring the implementation of the programme.

#### **Box 8 | Labour standards compliance in the Cambodian garment sector**

In 2001, in response to consumer concerns about poor working conditions in the garment sector, the U.S., promised Cambodia through a Bilateral Textile Trade Agreement, to increase import quotas in exchange for concrete efforts to bring working conditions in line with international labor standards. An important condition was the willingness of Cambodian factories to allow routine independent monitoring by the *Better Factories Cambodia* (BFC) project which was established by the ILO.

The agreement created positive incentives for compliance and led to a gradual improvement in working conditions and yearly increases in quota of up to 14%. Interestingly after 2006 when the agreement stopped, tripartite partners requested for a continuation of the monitoring of working conditions by the BFC project, given that improved working conditions were going hand in hand with productivity improvement and increased factory profits.

However, after 2006, monitoring reports were no longer made public. This resulted in rates of compliance to stagnate and even to decrease, except for factories that were selling to “reputation-sensitive” buyers. Also penalization by government inspectors of companies with low compliance was not happening. In addition to pressure from local unions, other CSOs and international buyers also played an essential role to campaign for a re-establishment of the public disclosure mechanism. When this mechanism was returned, compliance started increasing again from 2014 onwards (ILO, 2014; ILO & IFC, 2015; World Bank, 2015).

With the globalisation of the economy, decision-making on topics affecting labour relations are gradually shifting beyond the national level, resulting in an increasing need for tripartite dialogue structures at the regional and international level. The EU has the most extensive structures and procedures to organise social dialogue at the regional level, for example through the European Works

Council, but much less present in other regional bodies. Some examples do exist. Box 9 provides an example of the negotiations of a progressive labour & employment protocol in Southern Africa.

#### **Box 9 | Successful social dialogue at the regional level**

In August 2014 a progressive Labour & Employment Protocol was signed by a majority of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) heads of states in which a small technical support programme ANSA of the Southern African Trade Union Co-ordination Council (SATUCC), played a key role. The protocol had to act as a counter-balance against the wave of deregulation policies being launched by governments in the region. The protocol covers 16 themes, with reference to core international standards and a lot of labour-friendly clauses, related to *basic human rights, freedom of association and collective bargaining, equal treatment, employment and remuneration, improvement of working and living conditions, decent work for all, social protection, occupational health and safety, health care, retirement, unemployment and under-employment, maternity and paternity, people with disabilities, protection of children and young people, labour migration and migrant workers, informal employment and rural workers, and education & training and skills development.*

The following learning points emerge from this case study: (1) the importance of investing both in a broad internal support base for large scale policy influencing processes at the regional level, in addition to influencing external stakeholders; (2) the potential of working with power brokers, champions and windows of opportunity in difficult operating environments; (3) the relevance of intermediary support structures such as ANSA in policy influencing, but at the same time working on their financial and institutional sustainability; (4) the relevance of long term flexible support; and (5) the need to document policy influencing experiences to increase learning and maintain internal and external support. (FOS, 2016)

However, after 2006, monitoring reports were no longer made public. This resulted in rates of compliance to stagnate and even to decrease, except for factories that were selling to “reputation-sensitive” buyers. Also penalization by government inspectors of companies with low compliance was not happening. In addition to pressure from local unions, other CSOs and international buyers also played an essential role to campaign for a re-establishment of the public disclosure mechanism. When this mechanism was returned, compliance started increasing again from 2014 onwards (ILO, 2014; ILO & IFC, 2015; World Bank, 2015)

Finally, the inherent nature of trade unions as democratic membership organizations can lead them to provide a qualitatively different contribution to governance networks, than actors that operate on a different mobilization logic. For instance, civil society actors such as NGOs are faced with the perennial problem of democratically legitimating themselves through public campaigns, etc. Strengthening the involvement of trade unions in the governance of sustainable development processes, such as the SDGs might help in overcoming some of the shortcomings of mainstream human rights discourse and practice and in responding to the need for effective bottom-up influence in partnerships and governance (e.g. SDG17).



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*This section builds on findings from the following sources (Fashoyin, 2004; ILO, 2013b) (Davidov, 2004) (Van Gyes et al. 2015) (Budd & Bhawe, 2008) (Fiorito & Jarley, 2008; Foley & Polyani, 2006) (Webster & Joynt, 2014) (Fashoyin, 2004, Héthy 2001) (Campos and Root, 1996; Campbell, 2001) (Choi, 2000) (ILO, 2013c) (Vitols, 2011) (stammers, 2009)*

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## 5 CONTEXT – WHAT IS NEEDED FOR SOCIAL DIALOGUE TO CONTRIBUTE?

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The previous sections focused on how social dialogue can contribute to certain outcomes of sustainable development, including the SDGs. At the same time, research has found that the degree to which social dialogue can be an effective instrument is highly influenced by the context. There is therefore a need to specify in which settings and under what type of preconditions social dialogue can contribute optimally to social, economic and environmental goals.

This influence of context factors on the effectiveness of social dialogue is explored in two steps, addressing two central questions (1) What factors determine the effectiveness of social dialogue in general; and (2) What additional preconditions need to be in place for social dialogue to contribute to the broader sustainable development agenda?

### *Context factors when social dialogue focuses on the traditional labour agenda*

Studies continue to confirm the existence of a limited set of preconditions that determine the effectiveness of social dialogue at company level, sectoral level, national level or international level. While the relative importance of specific preconditions will also depend on historical patterns of labour relations in a given country<sup>10</sup>, the missing of several of these preconditions, which is common in times of crisis or in developing countries, will significantly limit the effectiveness of any social dialogue process.

The literature on the effectiveness of social dialogue distinguishes between national tripartite social dialogue and workplace social dialogue as both the actors and the issues dealt with will differ<sup>11</sup>.

For the **national level**, ILO (2013d), based on its long expertise in this area, identified six preconditions for successful tripartite social dialogue. The preconditions include first and foremost (1) the democratic space and freedom of association and collective bargaining, allowing social partners to organize and express themselves freely. (2) The social partners themselves should be strong, representative workers' and employers' organizations, with appropriate competence and the capacity to (make their members) comply with commitments. (3) There should be sufficient political will and a sense of responsibility of all parties to engage in social dialogue. (4) Adequate institutionalization, through funding and well-defined legal mandates, which ensures continuity of operations during political change. And finally, (5) the availability of experience in breeding trust as well as negotiation and cooperation skills, together with (6) accurate information and sound information exchange.

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<sup>10</sup> For differences within the EU, see for example the Eurofound (2013) typology on different types of industrial relations.

<sup>11</sup> Tripartite national dialogue will involve high level policy makers and the leadership of workers' and employer organisations. They will typically discuss national economic and social policies, such as labour market management and reform, employment promotion, productivity, income distribution and poverty reductions, pension reform, etc. Collective bargaining at workplace level on the other hand will mainly deal with the terms and condition of employment, and will most often involve a representative on the employer side and local workers' representatives. No research on success factors for social dialogue at international level was found.

These general preconditions are confirmed in various studies. For example, one study found that freedom of association is a necessary condition for a social dialogue response at the national level to emerge in the case of the economic and financial crisis of 2008. Another study by ILO brings forward the paramount importance of political and social stability determining the success of social dialogue reforms. In Indonesia, as is the case in many developing economies, low unionization levels amongst the growing group of informal economy workers seriously limits the coverage of existing social dialogue processes. In Ghana, as the agenda of national tripartite dialogue is restricted to minimum wage determinations, the government uses ad-hoc multi-stakeholder dialogues to consult civil society partners on economic and social policies. A recent study by the Ghanaian Labour Research and Policy Institute concludes that a lack of institutionalization of these multi-stakeholder dialogues leads to weak outcomes.

At **workplace level**, a wide range of preconditions are mentioned in the literature ranging from conditions around (1) effective information and consultation; (2) a conducive regulatory framework and dispute-settlement system; (3) a labour inspectorate; (4) necessary negotiation structures and basic rights of workers representatives; and (5) proven skills and training.

The importance of the presence of these basic preconditions is seen in a recent ILO study as an explanation why ILO, as one of the leading agencies working on strengthening social dialogue, has initiated substantially more projects on social dialogue in Latin America and Europe compared to Africa and Asia, where more preconditions will not be met.

The observation on the one hand of the potential of social dialogue for sustainable development, but the critical preconditions that need to be in place on the other hand for it to be an effective instrument, raises the question of what can be done fulfill some of the necessary preconditions. There are no silver bullet solutions in how to turn such settings into more conducive environments, but the insights are growing steadily. For example, the 2013 ILO synthesis review of ten years of ILO social dialogue projects identifies a number of critical success factors to strengthen social dialogue related to (1) the design of the interventions (long term support, involvement of social dialogue actors, ..); (2) capacity building (integrative approaches); and (3) strengthening labour laws (towards a more efficient labour administration).

#### *Additional preconditions to contribute to broader sustainable development issues*

There is a growing group of examples of social dialogue contributing to goals related to sustainable development beyond the pure labour agenda, both in workplace level dialogues as in national tripartite dialogues.

However, even in settings that are generally conducive to social dialogue, social partners might not be directly involved in, or contributing to broader sustainable development issues. There are arguably at least three contextual factors that determine if social dialogue can effectively contribute to the broader sustainable development agenda, beyond labour issues.

Firstly, social dialogue actors need to have the societal legitimacy to be engaged in these topics. This is not a formal or technical consideration, but a politico-ideological one. In which topics does the state want to grant social partners a larger role? To what degree is it, for a given topic, considered acceptable that social dialogue actors make (centralized) agreements, rather than relying on market forces or the actions of individual employers and workers? Do (unionized) workers consider certain topics valid for their representatives to engage on—perhaps they are hesitant to spend bargaining energy on topics that are less relevant to their particular and direct interest?

This 'distribution of legitimacy' for a given topic is mostly the result of historical debates and struggles, and to a large degree subject to institutional inertia and self-reinforcing dynamics. For example, by being involved in social dialogue around a certain topic due to an agreement, social dialogue actors gain legitimacy and experience, which strengthens their legitimacy and chances of being involved in future agreements, etc.

Secondly, the issues under consideration need to be 'within the reach' of tripartite structures of social dialogue—not just formally, but also in practice. For example, if certain social, labour, ecological, etc. regulation issues are linked to international agreements, but national tripartite actors are not capable to weigh on its' content or national translation—due to limited experience, little relative influence, or insufficient embeddedness in the correct networks—it is not correct to simply consider the outcomes of the national social dialogue dynamic on these issues as ineffective.

Finally, social dialogue actors need to have the skills and expertise to credibly and effectively engage in broader socio-economic topics of sustainable development. These topics are further removed from the 'bread-and-butter issues', typically centered around individual and collective labour relations and their (redistributive) conflicts.

This is an area where the actual practice on the ground is running ahead of research activities. Up to now research efforts have focused largely on the expanding agenda of social dialogue in European countries, and much less is known on what is happening in other continents, and on how this can be supported.

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*This section builds on findings from the following sources (Falletti & Lynch, 2009; Melloni, Pesce, & Vasilescu, 2016) (Alemán, 2010) (Baccaro & Heeb, 2011) (ILO, 2013a) (Labor Institute Indonesia, 2015) (Labour Research and Policy Institute Ghana, 2015) (Van Geys et al., 2015; Elen, 2010) (ILO, 2013a) (Alexander, 1999)*

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## 6 EMERGING RESEARCH AGENDA – WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW?

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This discussion note has illustrated with concrete examples the role social dialogue can play in working towards a more inclusive and sustainable world, both by contributing to specific goals and by providing a governance framework which brings together government, employers, workers, and in some cases, even a broader segment of stakeholders. The note is not exhaustive in its analysis, but has picked out findings from key sources to explore the social dialogue – sustainable development nexus.

Social dialogue has turned out to provide concrete and tested tools to bring key principles of the development effectiveness agenda into practice, especially through its attention for democratic ownership, inclusiveness and accountability. In addition, there is strong evidence that social dialogue is an excellent approach to tackle collective action problems in labour issues and beyond, something which very few governance systems have managed to achieve up to now.

What also emerges from reviewing the literature is that social dialogue as a mechanism can play a role in different contexts, from stimulating economic growth and redistribution in developed economies up to contributing to reconciliation and confidence building in fragmented societies. Some of the roles of social dialogue are well-tested and documented, other roles are still emerging and little is known about the underpinning success factors and how to nurture these roles successfully.

There is a need for an ambitious interdisciplinary research agenda that starts to address some of the key gaps in the body of knowledge which prevent social dialogue from reaching its full potential. Aside

from a better understanding of how social dialogue works in different contexts and settings, more efforts should go into understanding how the necessary preconditions can be established through targeted support efforts for social dialogue to be more effective.

Table 2: Overview of research agendas to push social dialogue to the next level

Research agenda	Themes	Research questions
<b>Covering new ground &amp; exploring missing links</b>	<i>Social dialogue in the informal economy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are effective strategies to extend the coverage of social dialogue to workers in the informal economy?</li> </ul>
	<i>Social dialogue in fragile states / developing countries</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the most appropriate and realistic forms of social dialogue for settings in which the preconditions for successful social dialogue are only weakly present?</li> <li>How can the necessary preconditions for social dialogue be nurtured without requiring complex and unrealistic exercises of institution building?</li> </ul>
	<i>Social dialogue at regional level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How can the role of regional groupings, such as SADC, MERCOSUR, etc in social dialogue be strengthened?</li> </ul>
	<i>Good practices on social dialogue &amp; gender</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are ways of strengthening the attention for gender concerns in collective bargaining?</li> </ul>
	<i>Implications of new trends in the world of work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent is social dialogue sufficiently adapted to global changes in the organisation of work &amp; production?</li> </ul>
<b>The link with the SDGs</b>	<i>Mapping the contribution of social dialogue to the SDGs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How can the impact of social dialogue on sustainable development be mapped most effectively?</li> <li>Can the framework based on five thematic areas and three principles presented in this note be operationalized as the basis for an M&amp;E framework?</li> </ul>
	<i>Making social dialogue work beyond the labour agenda</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the theories of change underpinning the contribution of social dialogue to sustainable development beyond the labour agenda? What are the critical success factors to do so and how can such processes be strengthened?</li> <li>How can the social partners be capacitated in technical areas beyond the labour agenda?</li> <li>To what extent can a tripartite-plus approach, with the cooperation of a broader set of stakeholders, further increase the development effectiveness of social dialogue?</li> </ul>
<b>Adapting to local contexts &amp; needs</b>	<i>Learning about what works for whom in which context</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the most effective instruments for social dialogue in different regional settings?</li> </ul>

Different research questions will require different research methodologies, research institutes and stakeholders to participate.

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